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SUBJECT: PROTECTION OF TRAFFICKING VICTIMS IN VIETNAM

11. (U) Summary: In Ho Chi Minh City, various sectors of society - including the city government, Communist Party mass organizations, NGOs, and even local churches - are working together to protect victims and women identified as particularly vulnerable to trafficking. A visit to the central provinces of Quang Binh and Quang Tri and to Danang City also revealed a high level of awareness of the issue of trafficking in persons among social welfare, local government, and law enforcement officials. Protection of victims of trafficking - including internal trafficking - is a clear part of official GVN policy and local practice. End Summary.

MULTI-SECTOR COOPERATION TO PROTECT WOMEN AND TIP VICTIMS

12. (U) In Ho Chi Minh City, the Center For Women In Difficult Circumstances is an example of the Ho Chi Minh City authorities' creative approach to the protection of victims and prevention of trafficking. Officials from the External Relations Office (ERO) of Ho Chi Minh City government and its Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA) escorted Hanoi Poloff and Ho Chi Minh City Econoff to the Center on April 23 to demonstrate the GVN's determination to, in the words of DOLISA Director Le Than Tam, "use every resource to combat trafficking." The Center, funded by the French/Cambodian NGO AFESIP (Action for Women in Distressing Circumstances), is staffed by members and officers of the Ho Chi Minh City Women's Union, four of whom are trained social workers. According to the Center's Director, the social workers seek out victims of trafficking or "women in high-risk situations" and invite them as "guests" to come live at the center, where they receive medical care, emotional counseling, vocational training, and job placement.

13. (U) The Center - a clean, bright, and new multi-story house in a pedestrian-only section of Ho Chi Minh City - currently houses 20 women, of whom two are victims of forced prostitution and two who were "rescued" as they were in the process of being trafficked. (The other residents of the center are former prostitutes, victims of sexual violence, or women viewed by the Women's Union or its partners as especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation or trafficking.) According to Nguyen Thi Ngoc Hanh, Vice President of the Ho Chi Minh City Women's Union, in addition to women introduced to the center by the resident social workers, the center also receives referrals from the Bac Ai Catholic Convent and "other churches" through those churches' links with ward-level Women's Union representatives. Nuns from Bac Ai also provide vocational training for the Center's guests. Ms. Hanh also noted that the Women Union's had similarly good ties with local Buddhist temples to assist with protection of potentially vulnerable populations.

14. (U) Still more referrals come from the police, Hanh said, clarifying that Ho Chi Minh City police "know to screen" arrested prostitutes to find out if they have been trafficked. In cases where the police identify trafficked victims, police refer those cases to the Women's Union, she added. Nguyen Van Minh, Deputy Director for DOLISA's Social Evils Prevention Office, described the Center as a pilot project; DOLISA hopes to see the Center expand to 30 beds within 3 years, and then, depending on the evaluation of the success of the project, to duplicate the Center elsewhere in Ho Chi Minh City.

DANANG, QUANG TRI, QUANG BINH SCREEN FOR TIP VICTIMS

15. (U) In separate meetings with Poloff April 20-23, other authorities from Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, Quang Tri, and Quang Binh confirmed that, in cases of prostitution arrests, they indeed screen the prostitutes to determine if they are trafficking victims. In Quang Tri, Quang Binh, and Danang, police officials said their primary motivation for screening was to develop information for use in arresting and prosecuting traffickers. In Danang, Nguyen Hung Hiep, Director of the Social Evils Prevention office of DOLISA, noted that the additional purpose of the information was to determine how best to "treat the victim." [Note: Vietnamese law considers prostitutes to be victims rather than

criminals and provides for "treatment" rather than incarceration. This treatment is not always voluntary. End note.] Ms. Nguyen Thi Mai, Deputy Director of Danang's DOLISA, said information regarding whether or not a prostitute was also a trafficking victim was a key factor considered by the "counseling council" (made up of representatives of the police, DOLISA, Women's Union, Justice Department, Youth Union, and Health Department) in determining what level of "treatment" to prescribe. In theory, Mai said, a trafficking victim could be assigned to a mandatory term at a prostitution treatment center, but the policy of Danang City would instead more normally be to assist a trafficking victim to return home. Police Colonel Le Tan Mai confirmed that "prostitution victims from out of town should be returned to their homes and families."

16. (U) Ho Chi Minh City authorities - specifically Lt. Col Toan of the City Police and DOLISA's Minh, said that Ho Chi Minh City had a policy similar to Danang's, but with the addition of material assistance to victims. Minh stated that Ho Chi Minh City policy, in accordance with the national law on prostitution (which provides wide latitude in the local treatment of prostitutes), distinguished explicitly between "volunteer" prostitutes and "forced" prostitutes. Trafficking victims, he said, would clearly be considered "forced" prostitutes and, rather than being sent to prostitution treatment centers, would instead be entitled to assistance both in returning home and in reintegrating into their communities, using funds from the "hunger alleviation and poverty reduction program, supplemented by Ho Chi Minh City government funds." Hanh of the Women's Union said that the Ho Chi Minh City DOLISA implemented this assistance in coordination with commune-level mass organizations, in particular the Women's Union. Ho Chi Minh City had provided this assistance to "hundreds of women," Hanh said, focusing on women "in especially difficult or vulnerable circumstances, such as poor women with children or sick family members."

17. (U) Quang Tri and Quang Binh, provinces in central Vietnam on the Laos border, do not currently have problems with trafficking, representatives from both provinces told Poloff. Deputy Director of Quang Tri's DOLISA Ngo Thanh Hung said that Quang Tri's lack of trafficking problems was due primarily to its location far from the Cambodia and China borders. Another reason he cited was that traffickers in Vietnam usually know their victims; since the pool of traffickers did not include residents or former residents of Quang Tri, the province was not targeted.

18. (U) However, Nguyen Thi Minh Chau, Vice President of the Quang Tri Women's Union, admitted that Quang Tri was a poor province and there was a problem with young people leaving their rural villages either permanently or between growing seasons, and that those people were vulnerable to both trafficking and labor exploitation. Colonel Van Ngoc Thai of the Quang Tri anti-crime office said he and his staff understood that traffickers in Vietnam used sophisticated techniques and that it required "hard work" to prevent trafficking. The police in Quang Tri, he pledged, worked with the Women's Union and DOLISA to provide regular awareness campaigns, including seminars and conferences for officials and village and commune-level "clubs" where trafficking methods could be discussed and information shared. According to Colonel Thai, women in these clubs became aware of the dangers of trafficking and of "alternative living options and opportunities" such as political participation and micro-credit programs. Colonel Thai credited the central government for providing the training and materials for these awareness-raising activities as well as the resources to make it possible to hold programs at least monthly.

PROTECTION OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN QUANG TRI

19. (U) DOLISA's Hung noted that, as a relatively poor province, Quang Tri was not a magnet for either migrant labor or prostitutes. However, he said, Quang Tri laborers were very interested in leaving the province to work. DOLISA checked out companies looking to hire Quang Tri workers very carefully, Hung promised. These companies were required to go through the Quang Tri labor service center, he said, and sign "labor supply contracts" with the service center, which checked out the companies carefully, examining capacity, financial condition, and the qualifications of the company's officers. "Many" companies failed the labor service center's inspections, Hung noted. Hung expressed confidence that Quang Tri was doing a "good job" of protecting workers, based on comparisons of labor contracts with company tax returns filed and also on interviews with prospective and returned laborers. Hung noted that the same labor service center had the responsibility for acting as the advocate of overseas workers with a labor export company in the event of a dispute between the two, but added that so far this circumstance had not arisen in Quang Tri.

10. (U) Quang Binh provincial officials also noted no cases of trafficking in persons and pledged that preventing such cases in the future was a priority. Nguyen Thi Hong, deputy Chair of the Quang Binh Women's Union, said that continued involvement in the lives of rural women and continual awareness-raising activities were the best ways the Women's Union could protect Quang Binh women against trafficking. Pham Thi Kim En, the head of the Quang Binh Women's Union's Family and Social Affairs Office, said that one of the Women's Union's "key efforts" was to protect women against those who would try to take advantage of former relationships. Educating local women about trafficking tricks employed elsewhere -- returning to home villages to encourage former friends and neighbors to "follow them" somewhere "to have a better life" by promising overseas travel, jobs, or good marriages, and then exploit those promises and their former village mates -- as well as helping them build strong families and coordinating official efforts throughout the province and across the border into Laos were the best tactics to keep trafficking from emerging in Quang Binh, Hong said. She noted also that the central government supplies Quang Binh with training, materials, guidance, and information about trafficking on a regular basis.

11. (U) Danang City officials described their comprehensive prevention/awareness raising program. Ms. Mai from DOLISA explained that the Women's Union and Youth Union jointly sponsored and carried out half-day programs in schools monthly or quarterly that focused on HIV/AIDS, drugs, and trafficking in persons. In addition to these programs, she said, once a year, all schools in Danang spent a week studying these issues in more depth. Awareness-raising programs that included posters and pamphlets as well as broadcasts on TV and radio accompanied these school programs, along with cultural and art activities and art contests, held once per year, on the subject of trafficking in persons and other social evils. Mai said she was confident that these activities reached the entire population and reduced trafficking in persons.

12. (U) Comment: The high level of understanding and awareness of trafficking issues in the poor and rural provinces of central Vietnam as well as the sophisticated and modern cities of Danang and Ho Chi Minh City is evidence that the central government's campaign to fight this problem is having an effect. The GVN's guidance and assistance allows Quang Binh and Quang Tri - and likely numerous other similarly poor provinces with vulnerable populations - to provide awareness-raising activities to prevent the development of a trafficking problem in those provinces. The national prostitution law's wide latitude also allows localities like Danang and Ho Chi Minh City to develop creative local responses to existing trafficking problems. In particular, the cooperation among the Women's Union, the police, the government, local and international NGOs, and churches and temples as demonstrated by the AFESIP project is evidence that the GVN's commitment to fighting trafficking and assisting trafficking victims is more than rhetorical, and has firmly part of ongoing implementation strategies.
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